

# THE Considine Report

CENTER FOR CHILD ADVOCACY NEWSLETTER

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Akron Children's Hospital

*By William Considine*  
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## Summit highlights past, present and future of children's health advocacy

On June 18, Akron Children's Hospital hosted its first Child Advocacy Summit in honor of my 40 years serving the hospital and our patient families. Throughout my tenure as CEO, advocacy and public policy have always been one of the keys to ensuring children had access to the care they need and pediatric hospitals had the necessary resources to provide the best care and train the next generation of pediatric providers.

The summit gave us the opportunity to look back at the progress we've made being champions for children. It also provided a platform for serious discussions about where we need to go in the future to be sure we're not leaving children behind. I was encouraged to see so many people who answered the call. Our speakers and participants came from all over the country with one goal in mind: advancing the voices of children.

Among our esteemed group of speakers were Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN's chief medical correspondent, J.D. Vance, New York Times bestselling author of *Hillbilly Elegy*, and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, who spoke about his efforts to expand funding for children's programs.

Many of our panelists cited the urgency to strengthen advocacy, collaboration and messaging around child-centered policies and securing the necessary funding to act in the best interests of our children.

Emcee **Debra Adams Simmons**, executive editor for culture at *National Geographic Magazine*, expertly set the stage for each speaker. Debra has a distinguished career in journalism, and she did a wonderful job throughout the day with thoughtful introductions of our panel discussions.



Panel discussion led by Nick Lashutka

# 40 Years of Child Health Advocacy

**Bruce Lesley**, president of First Focus, remarked on the successful Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the bipartisan support it received when first enacted in 1997. CHIP made a huge impact on providing access to health care for kids.

Bruce illuminated more recent developments, including data demonstrating that children are often forgotten in public policy development. Children's health accounts for 8% of federal spending, but they represent 100% of our nation's future.

Increases in childhood poverty, homelessness, suicide, abuse and other problems speak to the severity of this funding shortage. As we've seen in the past, particularly during the repeal-and-replace debate over the Affordable Care Act, children were left out of the discussions. We've made huge progress in insuring children, but we are facing increasing threats from disenrollment in Medicaid due to changes in eligibility and other rules.

Children's initiatives should always be a priority and receive equitable funding through public policy, Bruce said. This would demonstrate what we know to be true: children are our future.

**Shannon Jones**, executive director of Groundwork Ohio, shared the importance of messaging strategies with a focus on children's health care.

A former state representative and state senator in Ohio, Shannon is an expert in public policy development. She challenged the audience to put a human face on our messages and offer solution-oriented policy proposals to lawmakers.

The importance of a unified, understandable policy proposal is essential, she said. She urged advocates to focus on equitable access and long-term goals for overall improvements in child-health outcomes.



Mark Wietecha

It's critically important for the nation's freestanding, independent children's hospitals to carry this message to elected officials on Capitol Hill, said **Mark Wietecha**, president of the national Children's Hospital Association.

Mark noted the mounting public policy challenges related to children. More than half of the nation's 75 million children – 38 million – rely on Medicaid. Yet the Medicaid program has lost its focus on children, and future funding is at risk.

**Nick Lashutka**, president of the Ohio Children's Hospital Association, moderated the panel, and he reinforced the importance of collaboration. Nick, who also is president of the Solutions for Patient Safety (SPS) collaborative, emphasized the need to include the progress we've made in safety and quality in our messaging to show the value of pediatric-focused health care. Nick reiterated that children, and the hospitals that care for them, deserve adequate funding.

After the morning panel, **Dr. Sanjay Gupta** of CNN delighted the audience with his personal story about working as a journalist and practicing neurosurgeon. He brought an enlightening, hopeful tone to the summit. He focused broadly on what brings us together as humans, with specific attention paid to the importance of socialization to mental and physical health.



Dr. Sanjay Gupta



William Considine and Gov. Mike DeWine

Sanjay shared his perspectives on the impact of chronic stress and economic despair on families, citing both as reasons behind the decline in U.S. life expectancy over the past three years.

On a brighter note, **Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine** highlighted his efforts to add \$800 million in funding for children in his two-year budget proposal. Those initiatives included \$550 million for wraparound support services for schools and expanded support for programs targeting new mothers and babies, drug prevention, reducing lead exposure and foster care services.

Gov. DeWine said the state needs to be a better public health partner at the local level, and we have an opportunity now to impact Ohio's future. The governor's attention and willingness to invest in children's health is genuine and inspiring.

## Challenges and Opportunities in the Current Environment

**Tom Campanella**, director of the Health Care MBA program at Baldwin Wallace University, stressed the importance of collaboration among payers and providers, with a particular focus on solutions in the delivery of children's health care.

Based on his decades of experience in the insurance industry, Tom offered the audience a unique perspective on dealing with the insurance industry and developing health plans that would be friendlier toward children and families.

Led by moderator Mark Wietecha, panelists discussed social determinants of health and the impact of childhood trauma on mental and physical health. **Reem Aly**, a vice president at the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, reinforced the data shared by Bruce Lesley, noting substantial worsening of behavioral health diagnoses among Ohio's children, as outlined in the institute's recently published "Assessment of Child Health and Health Care in Ohio."

Like earlier panelists, she encouraged the audience to better brand child health care policy proposals. In particular, she was referring to the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the Medicaid program, considering they cover 54% of all children in the U.S.

**Dr. Kurt Newman**, president and CEO of Children's National Medical Center in Washington D.C., encouraged child advocates to hone their message and build collaborative networks that communicate these compelling stories. The current national health profile of our children is unacceptable, and we need to address their unmet, unfunded needs, said Kurt, a surgeon and recognized leader in pediatric health.

He also noted that the mission of many independent children's hospitals – which include pediatric-focused education and research efforts – remains inadequately funded.



Dr. Kurt Newman

The second keynote speaker, author **J.D. Vance**, captured the audience with his deeply personal account of the story of his family, featured in his bestselling book. J.D. discussed the powerful effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) as social determinants of health. He identified himself as an example of how multiple ACEs negatively affect an individual's maturation process. His message was particularly effective, given the challenges many children face due to the adverse events that have framed their early lives and affected their development.

## The Future of Health Care



Maureen Corcoran

Ohio Medicaid Director **Maureen Corcoran** reinforced the importance of the governor's agenda, and said she and her staff are interested in ideas to address the many childhood health challenges we are facing.

A trusted and admired public servant, Maureen discussed behavioral health care issues, the enormous growth in patient volume and the need for collaborative solutions. Her department is a willing partner and is solution focused.

As CEO Emeritus of Akron Children's Hospital, I offered my perspective on the need to convince our elected officials that investing in children saves money in the long run. The summit marked 40 years since I became CEO, and I shared my DREAM for making the decade starting in 2020 the Decade of the Child. We need to devote our efforts over the next 10 years to making real progress in improving the health outcomes of our children and removing the barriers that impede their growth and development.

I know the attendees BELIEVE in the need and will continue to LEAD the way in advancing our advocacy message. To ACHIEVE our Decade of the Child goals, we'll need specific plans, public policy support and collaboration between the private and public sectors. We need a federal health care program solely dedicated to and branded for children.



Akron Children's President and CEO **Grace Wakulchik** summarized the day's engaging interactions. She thanked everyone and challenged all attendees to roll up their sleeves and assist in crafting the plans that will ensure we are providing the same opportunities and care to all children that we expect for our own.

If you attended the summit, or have any child advocacy ideas, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the key takeaways. Did you learn anything new about the state of children's health care? What plans are you formulating in your own organizations to address the issues highlighted by our speakers? How can we collaborate to bring all stakeholders to the table and refocus our state and national priorities on meeting the needs of our children?

Please feel free to contact me. Let's keep our momentum going!



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